Math COMPASS Exam Test Tips

**Take Your Time:** The COMPASS Exam is not a race. Spending a little more time on test day can save you a whole lot of time by not having to taking the test again. Double check your answers, try doing the problem different ways to see if you get the same answer, and take time to breathe if you’re getting stressed.

**Get the First Five Questions Right:** The COMPASS Exam is responsive, pushing you up levels of difficulty as you get answers correct. The more consecutive questions you get right, the higher the level. The higher the level, the more points you get. Don’t submit an answer on the first five questions until you know you’re right!

**Tips on the Questions:**

1. **Use your calculator to your advantage.** Spend some time prior to the exam getting used to the basic Windows calculator (below). Knowing how to plug things into the calculator may help you get questions right that you may not know how to do by hand!

![Calculator Image]

2. **Use the answers to your advantage.** The right answer is sitting right in front of you! If you don’t know how to solve or get the equation for a graph, test the answers you’re given until you find one that works.

3. **Eliminate obviously wrong answers.** If you don’t know the answer, but you know it’s going to be some horrible decimal and answer C is 10, then C is obviously not correct. Mark it off and look at the remaining four answers.
4. **Know your vocabulary.** Words like perimeter, sum, difference, product, arithmetic mean, quotient, solution, slope, intercept, factor etc. are important and come up often. As you go through the practice test (www.act.org/compass/sample/index.html), any words you are not familiar with you should look up and get comfortable with. Don’t ignore them!

5. **Know your formulas.** As you go through the practice test, you may notice that they assume you know certain formulas, e.g. the distance formula, perimeter, area, volume, etc. If they assume this on the practice, they will assume this on the COMPASS test. Make sure you know them!

6. **Know how to plug numbers into an equation/expression.** It comes up often and it helps even on problems that don’t specifically ask you to do it. Get comfortable with negatives and parentheses.

7. **Know how to factor.** Seriously….It comes up a lot so the sooner you get it down, the better.

8. **Know how to do order of operations.** In math order of operations is a rule used to clarify which procedures should be performed first in a given math expression. The acronym **PEMDAS** will help you to remember what should be performed first. PEMDAS stands for Parentheses, Exponents, Multiplication, Division, Addition, Subtraction.

9. **Know how to calculate fractions and percents.** This also comes up often! Know your calculations with fractions, including finding the lowest common denominator, simplifying fractions and mixed numbers, and multiplying and dividing fractions. You will also need to know how to calculate operations with decimals, such as converting decimals to fractions and vice versa. Also, be sure you know how to calculate percentages, ratios, and proportions.

**Pre-Algebra (Basic Math) – High School Level**

http://www.khanacademy.org/ - Select the math tab and click the link that says arithmetic and pre-algebra to jump to that section of math to get clear instructional videos on basic math and pre-algebra. It is especially helpful if you struggle with math concepts.

http://coolmath.com – For ages 13 – 100!! This is a colorful and fun site with excellent teaching units. On the left hand side menu click pre-algebra and then you can select the different lesson topics in pre-algebra.

http://www.math.com – Be sure to click the pre-algebra link on the left hand side and it will take you to the different topics to choose from. Stay away from the parts that require payment for services.